

# **Hard Days: Advice to leaders**

## **(A message to leaders suffering from emotional wounds)**

**by**  
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### **My Mind's Fear**

*Once, my warrior's heart knew no fear,  
Leading men at the tip of the spear,  
Our mission was to fight, for all that was right, good, and dear,  
I now stand alone; comrades and buddies no longer near,  
Fighting with memories that will not die,  
When the phantoms return, my mind cries,  
But one reality remains ever clear,  
This once brave warrior,  
Now fights his own mind's fear.*

~ Kamena

There are no hard days at Maxwell Air Force Base. Sometimes life and school become frustrating, from time to time we disappoint others and ourselves, and once in a while we are overwhelmed in our attempt to balance family, career and community obligations; but there are no hard days.

Fortunately, I can count the number of actual hard days in my life on one hand; the day my security team and I were pinned down for more than an hour by accurate mortar fire<sup>i</sup>; the day I held the hand of a dying woman when the bus she was riding was blown-up by terrorists;<sup>ii</sup> and finally, by knowing people were killed because of the orders I gave in combat<sup>iii</sup>.

Hard days have a way of draining the soul and spirit. A decade of sustained combat is exacting a toll well beyond unacceptably large number of physical casualties, the dead and wounded; the number of emotionally wounded is greater

by far. Emotional wounds do not have to rise to the level of PTSD (post traumatic stress disorder) to be destructive to careers, relationships and individuals.

Sometimes traumatic events make us stronger, and sometimes the event is so severe that it must be suppressed. When the mind cannot make sense of what has occurred it will push the images of a hard day to the sub-conscience; those memories come to the forefront once again only when triggered by the sights, sounds and smells similar to those of that hard day.

Hard days show no deference for position or age; hard days indiscriminately affect all, regardless of gender, race, or religious preference. Unfortunately, the more senior the person affected by a hard day, the less likely that person is to seek help.

Below are some thoughts about hard days offered with the sincere desire to help those leaders who will not seek assistance because of their station in life, rank or position:

- You have changed: You sense it, but others live with the fact you are not the same person you once were. Restless or sleepless nights, irritability and anger, antisocial or reclusive behavior are indicators that something is wrong. The symptoms can also be as harmless as having difficulty concentrating. It is easy to rationalize away the manifestations of hard days, but deep down you, your family and the people you influence know the truth—you are not the person you once were.
- Lead yourself: Show the same leadership and demonstrate the same concern for yourself that you would if a subordinate was wrestling with the effects of hard days. Seeking help is an obligation you owe to yourself and the people you care about. The fact is you will continue to have hard days until you take action to come to terms with what has occurred.
- Help is available: The military has recognized the challenge of emotional wounds and help is available. There are resources on and off base (post), but even the best of care is wasted if it is not used. The first step is to admit there is a problem, and yes, this might be another hard day, but things get better from that point on. Leaders are often concerned with the stigma of receiving

care; guess what, if you have emotional wounds, people already know. The only real stigma is the one from not seeking help.

- The cost of procrastinating: The cost of delay can be great, loss of friends, loss of family, loss of a job, loss of all that really matters. Emotional wounds cannot be “worked through” on one’s own. Make this your last hard day and get the help you need.

Hard days, especially when left untreated, have a corrosive effect on leaders; the additional stress of being responsible for others and having to live with the decisions you have made, intensifies the stress and the effects on those who lead. Multiple hard days have a cumulative effect as well; people, even leaders, do not get used to the sights and experiences of really hard days.

Leaders set good examples for others to emulate. Dealing with emotional wounds, caused by hard days, should not be an exception. When leaders do what is right, others will follow. Set the example and get the help you need.

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<sup>i</sup> The 30 March, 2001 mortar attacked in Krivenik, Kosovo, killed two and wounded ten people

<sup>ii</sup> The 16 February 2001 bus bombing, in Kosovo, at Gate 3 in the British Sector killed twenty people and wounded many more.

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